

Big surprise: County might build new arena

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Montgomery to consider new arena

**County Council unaware
that building an indoor
multipurpose center was on
list of potential '07 projects**

By Dena Levitz
Examiner Staff Writer

Buried at the bottom of a preliminary list of Montgomery County legislative priorities, County Council members were surprised Tuesday to see an item about a new multipurpose arena.

It's a project that's certainly not on the books, let alone one

the council planned to try to fund in 2007, the year to which the list pertained. But it's included at least as a possible project for discussion purposes, something that particularly perplexed Council Member Marilyn Praisner.

"It's hard to believe that they put it on there without sharing it with any council member," she said during the meeting.

Melanie Wenger, the director of the office of intergovernmental affairs, explained that county economic development leaders are having a feasibility study done to see whether a large indoor facility would help the county when it comes to events like large high school graduations.

"This is extremely preliminary,"

Wenger said.

She noted that all she knows is that the study is some type of a joint effort between the Maryland Stadium Authority and economic development department for the county.

The graduation venue issue is one that has gotten progressively bigger, along with the sizes of high school classes in the county.

Parents at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, one of the schools with the most vocal concerns about outgrowing past venues, have even pushed for administrators to allow for the use of a larger religious facility, Jericho City of Praise Church in Prince George's County. But their efforts so far have been rebuffed.

Numerous calls to the Maryland Stadium Authority and to various members of the economic development department about the scope of the arena study were not returned Tuesday.

Currently, the county's most high-profile arena is The Music Center at Strathmore, which opened in 2005. The state-of-the-art concert hall adjacent to the Grovesnor/Strathmore Metro stop holds just less than 2,000 seats. But most Montgomery County high schools have been using the 3,500-seat Daughters of the American Revolution Constitution Hall in the District. The Jericho Center, which was used a few years ago, holds close to 10,000 people.

dlevitz@dcexaminer.com